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The Fetish of Internationalism

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Plans and blueprints for international organization are legion, but do any of them represent world peace A distinguished philosopher gives ten criteria for separating world government from vague internationalism.

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Nothing less than world government will establish world peace, even in the least degree. To make this point, we do not have to describe the precise character of world government and the way in which it will be related to all the levels of local government that must remain. We do not have to choose between the various blueprints for world political organization which have so far been offered. We do not have to defend any of these plans or projects in their institutional details.

As a matter of fact, we are still too remote from the realization of world government to be able to conceive the precise character of the institutional arrangements. Current plans and blueprints do us a disservice if they distract our attention from the indisputable principles and draw discussion into the area of questionable details.

The argument can be put in a nutshell. Let any one suppose the maximum extent of political organization short of world government. Let him suppose large regional federations in place of a larger plurality of independent states. Let him even suppose the world divided into two regional federations and, for the purpose of illustration, let us imagine these to be an Atlantic and a Pacific community of federated states.

But one condition remains. Each of these two regional federations

retains its external sovereignty. Each is an independent political organization, with its own foreign policy and its diplomats, with its defensive armaments which may have to be used aggressively, with its insistence, by right of sovereignty, that it must decide what is for its own interests.

By performing this experiment in our imagination, we can see that a state of war will not have been abolished. Nor will actual combat be prevented. In this imagined situation, actual warfare may be postponed for a much longer time than it has ever been in the world's history, especially if the two great powers are evenly matched in physical resources, industrial capacity, manpower, and military prowess.

But nothing in the nature of power allows us to suppose that the balance will be forever preserved. In the scales of power, a perfect equilibrium can never be maintained, even if it momentarily happens. Furthermore, other considerations of partisan interest, which weigh heavily in foreign policy, may lead one of the regional federations to take the risks involved in the awful arbitrament of war.

We have seen this happen when a balance of power has been approximated by vast alliances and ententes. Two vaster power blocs in the form of regional federations will not change the picture.

Between a single world government and two regional federations there can be no choice, if world peace is the aim. The person who supposes the contrary confuses peace with truce. The most enduring truce is not the least degree of peace. Interregional warfare would remain as inevitable as international warfare is now.

Even if the imperfect peace established by world government did not preclude certain types of civil strife, the situation would be different. However imperfect, world peace would have had a beginning. Civil strife might interrupt it, but peace, not a truce, would be recovered when it was over; and the civil strife might lead to political improvements and economic reforms, through which a higher degree of peace might be secured.

This line of argument may not satisfy the person who thinks there is an easier way to get world peace. By the maximum degree of political organization short of world government, he does not mean two or more regional federations. He means some form of international organization, such as a reconstituted League of Nations. He means a development of international law, administered through the agency of world courts, and enforced by a cosmopolitan police

force.

He may envisage international tribunals as having compulsory jurisdiction over all controversies between nations, not merely those legal issues which nations voluntarily submit to arbitration. He may envisage the police force as having sufficient power to execute international law, and to enforce the judgment of its courts. The police force itself he may conceive as recruited in any number of ways.

The point at issue therefore comes to this. How far can we go in the direction of international organization without setting up world government? How shall we draw the line between world government and any sort of international organization which falls short of it? Will anything short of world government procure world peace, or will it only tend to prolong a truce?

In order to show that nothing less than world government will do, it is necessary to draw the line which divides it from mere internationalism. Until we draw that line sharply, we cannot tell whether or not the objection is based on self-deception. In the various proposals mentioned above, a man may in fact be projecting world government, though he tries to avoid the name. Or he may deceive us and himself by proposing something which approaches world government and yet is as much a miss as if it were miles away.

To draw the line between world government and all its counterfeits or approximations, we need not consider the institutional details on either side of that line. We can make the distinction by appealing to clear-cut principles.

There is nothing fuzzy or indefinite about these principles, though most of the historic peace plans and a great many contemporary books have tried to evade their implications by fudging the issues. Whether the fudging has been willful or artless self-deception makes no difference. To play fast and loose with these principles ends in contradiction.

Above all, we must defeat the tendency of language to obscure the principles, and to save us from knowing that we have contradicted ourselves. Such words as "nation," "national," and "international" are the worst offenders.

Do we mean the same thing when we speak of international law and of laws to be enacted and enforced by world government? Do we mean the same thing when we speak of regulating inter-

national affairs and when, as under the government of the United States, we speak of interstate commerce as subject to federal regulation?

Do we mean the same thing when we speak of the world community as a society of nations or as a society of men belonging to different races or nationalities and living under different local government? Do we mean the same thing when we think of a world-state and of a world-wide federal organization subordinating the politics of local areas?

To determine what our words mean and what our thoughts imply, we must have criteria by which to judge the variety of possible situations with respect to world affairs.

There seem to be only four major possibilities: (1) a plurality of independent, sovereign states which may enter into alliances with one another by treaty; (2) a confederacy or league of independent states which may or may not be supported by alliances; (3) a world community including all peoples under world government, federal in structure; and (4) a world state which consists of a world community under government that is not federal in structure.

We can omit consideration of regional federations. Either these regional federations will be independent political units, and so will fall into the first or second category; or they will be subordinate parts of a world community, and so will fall into the third category,

No one can confuse the first and the fourth possibilities. A plurality of independent states stands at one extreme. A single world state stands at the other.

The difficult problem concerns the two middle cases. These tend to be confused. Moreover, some form of international confederacy or league of nations is often proposed as a satisfactory substitute for world government, federal or otherwise. It is not satisfactory unless that ersatz peace, a truce, is our only aim.

There is one criterion which, by itself, draws the line between arrangements that can result only in a truce and institutions that can secure peace. That criterion is sovereignty.

If any vestige of external sovereignty remains, if there is any relic of what we call "national independence," then the plan under consideration falls on the truce side of the line. It falls there even if it speaks the language of international law, world courts, and interna-

tional organization. It might even be said that it falls there precisely because it still retains all the notions connected with internationalism.

Unfortunately, there is much quibbling about sovereignty, and a rampant loose use of the word. This arises from failure to distinguish the internal and external aspects of sovereignty, or from careless talk about sovereignty as a “bundle” of rights—as if the rights belonging to external sovereignty could be surrendered piecemeal.

To circumvent such quibbling, let us use the following criteria for testing on which side of the line any proposal falls. These criteria add up to the presence or absence of external sovereignty; they permit no doubts as to whether a given proposal is a truce plan or a peace plan.

1. Will local governments need and have a foreign policy and with it the work of a foreign office or state department, diplomats and emissaries?

If so, then even if there be some form of international organization it will be a mere league or confederacy, not a world federal government or a world state.

2. Will there be any need or room for treaties of “peace” contracted by separate political communities?

If so, then we do not have world government, federal or otherwise.

3. Do the states which are members of an international organization have the right to secede from that organization?

If so, then it is a mere league or confederacy, not a federal structure.

4. Must any rule or decision of an international council or assembly be adopted by the unanimous assent of all the states therein represented?

If so, then that legislative body belongs to a league or a confederacy. It is not the congress or parliament of a federal government, in which any type of majority rule can prevail.

5. Will there be immigration restrictions and trade barriers which affect the passage of peoples or goods across the boundaries

of local communities?

If they are the enactments of the several local governments, and not of the world government, then the several local governments are not merely local divisions of a central, federal government, but remain autonomous in their external relations.

6. Will there be, in addition to an international police force, armaments and military establishments held in reserve for some other purpose than the enforcement of federal or local laws?

If so, the international organization does not have the power proper to a federal government, and the member states have more power than is proper for local governments. The issue here is not between, total disarmament and the retention of some implements of force. The issue is rather between, the status of such implements—as instruments of war or as Instruments of law enforcement.

7. Will the internal affairs of the several states be entirely exempt from intervention by the international organization, even though the course of internal affairs in one state seriously affects the welfare of another?

If so, then the several states have merely joined a league or a confederacy. They have not become members of a federal organization.

8. Will individual men have citizenship only in their local community, being represented in world affairs in an indirect manner by emissaries of the state to which they belong? Will the international organization attempt to regulate states alone, affecting individuals indirectly, only through the mediation of the state to which they belong?

If so, then the international organization is not a federal government, and its laws and their enforcement do not operate in the federal manner.

9. Will the budget of the international agencies be met by a levy on the several states, in contrast to all methods of financing government by direct taxation upon individual citizens?

If so, then these international agencies belong to a league or confederacy. They are not the departments of a federal government.

10. Will patriotism still consist in a paramount devotion to the

goodness of a local community and a desire to see it pre-eminent in any respect over other local communities, or at the expense of the general welfare?

If so, then such patriots have only a national allegiance. They are not citizens of the world, and there is no world community or workable government.

These ten criteria sharply separate every form of internationalism from every form of world government. They are so closely connected that a negative or affirmative answer to any one will mean no or yes all along the line. It could not be otherwise, since these ten criteria do no more than express concretely what is involved in the single criterion of sovereignty.

By these ten criteria we can, see what it means to say that nothing less than world government will secure world peace. Anything less leaves the world composed of independent nations in a state of war, potential or actual. Any plan proposes something less than world government if it answers these questions affirmatively.

Let us look for a moment at international law to see why it cannot possibly meet the needs of the situation. The point is not that international law is at present defective and that, when developed or improved; it will perform the task of keeping peace. The point is that world peace requires a complete transcendence of international law.

International law is usually divided into general and particular. Its general content consists of the customs which prevail in the conduct of international affairs. It would be more accurate to say that it consists of maxims which are sometimes acknowledged as a matter of custom and some times honored as moral precepts.

It is supposed to be a matter of custom that nations respect each other's sovereignty. It is at least customary for each nation to demand respect for its own sovereignty.

It is a moral precept that nations, like individuals, should keep the promises they have made.

These two maxims summarize the general content of international law in so far as it concerns the rights of nations and their duties to one another. It should be obvious at once, from the whole history of international affairs, that nations frequently violate each other's rights, and frequently fail to discharge their obligations. Inter-

national law is as powerless to prevent such malfeasance or non-feasance as it is powerless to prevent the wars which result therefrom.

General international law merely describes the customary grounds for international conflict. It does not prescribe what every nation must do or suffer the penalty of law enforcement. What Bertrand Russell once said of ethics applies to general international law: it is the art of recommending to others the things they must do in order to get along with one's self.

Particular international law consists of all the rights and obligations which have been defined by specific treaties between nations. This in itself is strange. A treaty is nothing but a contract between individuals. It is not like the social compact or the constitutional convention by which individuals set up a form of government. It is exactly like a contract between private individuals engaged in some sort of transaction with one another.

Such contracts do not make law, except in the paradoxical sense in which, international law is law. Furthermore, if a private individual breaches a contract, the legal system of his community provides a way for determining who is at fault, what damage has been done, what compensation must be made. Applying the law of contracts, courts judge the controversy, and other officials use public power to enforce the judgment.

But in the international situation the only rule is the maxim that promises should be kept—by the other party! I do not mean to imply that nations always dishonor their treaties. Many treaties have been observed in the spirit as well as the letter. Within the last hundred years, many controversies over treaty obligations have been voluntarily submitted to courts of arbitration, and the tribunal's decision has been accepted by the party adversely affected, and voluntarily executed.

But when matters of paramount national interest are at stake, international law breaks down. The matter may or may not be submitted to an impartial tribunal, and even if it is, the party adversely affected may refuse to comply with the court's judgment, in which case the other party must help itself. This means war. That is why the members of the League did not try to save Ethiopia by enforcing sanctions against Italy.

There are still other aspects of international law which show its peculiarity. It needs the mediation of national law in order to regu-

late the conduct of individual men living in independent states.

It holds all the members of a state collectively responsible for the acts of its nations. War is not made against the particular individuals who may have committed the injury which occasions a conflict; it is made against all the people of the country to which those particular individuals belong, without respect to who is or who is not at fault.

International law does not distinguish between criminal acts and civil causes, nor does it separate punitive action from compensatory remedies.

It does not attempt to make the punishment fit the crime. It does not follow the rule of justice that gradations of punishment should be correlated with gravity of the offense. Minor as well as major offenses elicit the capital punishment of war without violating the peculiar sort of justice embodied in international law.

When all these things are contrasted with the characteristics of legal systems having political foundation, we see how peculiar international law is. We see that it is a law divorced from political institutions. It is a law of *nations* living together under government. It is a law of *war* (potential or actual), not a law of peace.

I quote my favorite authority on matters which are profound, but not too subtle for clear wits to grasp. An editorial in The New Yorker observes :

Law is, unfortunately, not law unless it is enforceable, and the "laws" of warfare are in their very nature unenforceable, being a mere set of rules for quarreling, which any country can disregard if it chooses. When war comes, each nation makes its own rules to suit itself. Japan makes hers, which includes murdering enemy fliers.... When at length Japan is punished, as she certainly will be, for having executed American aviators, the act of punishing her will not be "justice" since no court exists which has jurisdiction and no force exists for carrying out such a court's order. To call it justice is to do ourselves a disservice, because it deflects our gaze from the terrible spectacle of a world without law.

Precisely because international law is the law of a society of nations, not the law of a society of men, it can never be developed or improved to the point where it will function effectively to keep the peace. Law will function effectively in world affairs only when it


ceases to be international.

When we cross the line dividing the anarchic from the political community, we experience a change of kind, not one of degree. When we cross the line between every form of international alliance (or league) and world government, the difference is again one of kind, not degree. So, too, when we pass from international law to the legal system of a world-wide political community.

Not by alterations or improvements in international law, but by its *total abolition* in favor of a different kind of legal system, will we transcend the international order—the order of battles and truces.

International law, like the customs and treaties which comprise its content, belongs to the present era of world history. In its time, it may serve a certain purpose, but it can never serve the purpose of making or keeping peace.

We can have no excuse for blurring or obscuring the clear-cut distinction between an international order and a world political community. If we use the word “international” to mean “relating diverse nationalities,” then there are many international governments already in existence. The government of the Soviet Union is certainly international in this sense. But if we use the word “international” to mean “relating independent states or sovereign nations,” then we should know that “international government” is as self-contradictory as “round-square.”

The best way to remember how we are using the word “international” is by reference to *international law*. In that sense of the word, it properly applies only to battles or truces and to the anarchic community which is called a “society of nations.” It does not apply to peace or government or to the world community of the future which must be a society of men. 

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